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ABSTRACT

This digest discusses two recurrent themes presented in the New Directions for Community Colleges volume titled "Organizational Change in the Community College: Ripple or Sea Change?" First, change in the external environment is accelerating, and colleges must respond to these changes to thrive. External environmental influences include differences in the economy, government relations, the demographics of student populations (more immigrants, high school dropouts, returning and displaced workers, welfare participants, and workers in need of skill upgrading), and the development of new technologies. All of these factors require responses from the community college. The second theme is that organizational change can either be internally initiated or externally imposed. California Legislation AB 1725 and case studies from Minnesota and Arizona State colleges and universities are cited to illustrate this position. The digest concludes with the observation that a lack of institutional cooperation hinders the implementation of legislatively mandated changes and that state lawmakers should solicit the input and support of the higher education community before passing legislation that dramatically affects those institutions. (AS)

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Digest

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Managing Organizational Change in the Community College

by Carol Kozeracki

A review of the articles presented in the *New Directions for Community Colleges* volume entitled *Organizational Change in the Community College: Ripple or a Sea Change?* reveals two recurrent themes in the process of organizational change in community colleges. First, change in the external environment is accelerating, and the colleges must respond to these changes to thrive. Second, organizational change can either be internally initiated or externally imposed.

External Influences

A number of articles remind us of the variety of environmental and societal changes taking place. Levin's study of six western community colleges found that differences in the economy, government relations, the demographics of their population (more immigrants, high school dropouts, returning and displaced workers, welfare participants, and workers in need of skill upgrading), and the development of new technologies required a response from the community college.

Laden builds on the theme of changing demographics to argue that community colleges need to change their cultures to welcome and serve minority students more appropriately. Townsend and Twombly present critiques that challenge community colleges to stop "tinkering" with the system and undertake changes that will radically alter the purposes of the college. At the very least, feminist critics argue that community college leaders should push for policies such as equal pay for equal work, affirmative action in hiring, establishment of paid maternity leave and sexual harassment policies, and the incorporation of feminist strategy in the classroom. At best, institutions should attempt to counteract the influences of the capitalist society thereby making community colleges agents for societal change.

Bergquist's essay describes the transition from a modern to a postmodern society, which is founded on technology and information. Fragmentation and chaos - results of the uncontrolled growth experienced in the modern era - often pervade the postmodern organization. Thus, today's managers must respond to two pressing questions: how large should the organization be and how can integration best be maintained? Bergquist concludes that managers must think in terms of appropriate size rather than indiscriminate growth. They should also realize that "informal and powerful channels of communication and leadership by example" (p. 90) have been found to work most effectively in the postmodern environment.

Internal vs. External Initiatives

Organizational change is initiated through an externally imposed plan or through the proactive efforts of community college administrators. The following four case studies provide evaluations of organizational change by internal observers whose perspectives are necessarily influenced by their involvement in the process of change.

In 1988, the California legislature passed AB 1725, mandating shared governance in California's community colleges, with three goals in mind: "to create more collegial governance systems, increase the power and influence of local academic senates, and separate community colleges from their K-12 roots by placing them more clearly in a higher education model" (White, 1998, p. 20). The implementation of this bill had less desirable results than anticipated. The failure of this bill to achieve its goals appears to be the result of several factors. First, the implementation process itself inevitably resulted in modifications to the original purpose of the legislation. Second, because colleges sometimes behave bureaucratically and politically, "it is unreasonably optimistic to believe that a single conceptual approach to governance ... can be grafted successfully onto 1, 10, or 106 community colleges" (p. 22). Other obstacles to the implementation process were a lack of consensus on the meaning, intent, or goals of the concept; suspicion on the part of the different constituencies that led to an inability to cooperate; and gridlock resulting from decision-making by committee. White concluded that ultimately the responsibility for shared governance belongs to the individual institutions, rather than the state legislature. Each institution has a unique political environment and its own set of historic and cultural variables, and should devise its own governance model.

On July 1, 1995, the Minnesota Community College System, the Minnesota State University System, and the Technical College System merged into the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) as the result of a legislative mandate. The author of this case study argues that the legislators' decision was an overreaction to relatively minor problems; the precipitating causes were never well articulated, there was neither a clear vision of how the new system should operate nor what outcomes were expected, and that the bill was passed without the support of the higher education administrators or even many of the legislators. Four years were allowed for the implementation to take place, but the transition was not smooth, largely because of the lack of cooperation among the three existing systems. The integration of the

differing funding and allocation policies, local labor contracts, business policies, and administrative service arrangements also proved to be obstacles. Another big hurdle was the refusal of the state legislature to provide sufficient funds to implement the merger.

Contrast these situations with two internally initiated processes in which the hiring of new presidents quickly led to the re-evaluation of the institutional mission and a strategy to address existing problems. When a new president arrived at Rio Salado College in Arizona in 1990, she faced a college in transition and instituted a series of management models to address the evolving status of the institution. The innovative 12-year old college, which emphasized instructional technology and an entrepreneurial attitude, was facing declining enrollments, increased competition from other recently opened colleges, and a reputation as "a college of second choice." The president encouraged the college to adapt Total Quality Management (TQM), a management philosophy that emphasizes meeting and exceeding customer expectations, reducing error, empowering employees and teams, continuous and incremental improvement, prevention, and using tools and data to solve problems. The idea was well received and implemented over the next few years with significant involvement from all members of the college.

However, by 1994, it became apparent that the TQM process had become bureaucratized and incapable of fast, responsive innovation. The college leadership looked for a new model that would better respond to their current situation, and found their answer in Senge's less structured concept of the learning organization, "a place where people continually expand their capacity to create its future" (Thor, Scarafiotti, & Helminski, 1998, p. 61). This model built on the TQM foundation but was dynamic rather than structured and formal. Although it is difficult to establish a definite cause and effect relationship between the adopted management models and outcomes, Rio increased its full-time student equivalent enrollment by over 50% between 1990 and 1997.

Phoenix College experienced similar success. Once again, a new president arrived, and found both strengths (a high standard for college teaching, a student-centered culture, and an attractive physical plant) and problems (significant enrollment drop since the prior year; the need for capital for infrastructure improvements; stagnant program development; and a campus climate described as risk-averse, lacking in trust, and low in creativity). Enrollment problems were addressed through renewed outreach and a re-energized business and industry training operation. In 1994, the district succeeded in passing a $386 million bond for rebuilding the campus plant infrastructure and updating the instructional and administrative equipment.

The campus climate issues were more difficult to assess and improve. The president worked to change the campus from a static, hierarchical, paternalistic model to an "interactive organization" (Pepicello & Hopkins, 1998, p. 70). The president communicated regularly with faculty and staff through e-mail, and invited comments and reactions. Open campus discussions on a variety of strategic topics were held for faculty and staff, and the information gathered was used as part of the strategic planning process. Process Improvement Teams, composed of faculty and staff, were initiated to look at areas as diverse as custodial services and financial aid. The president met with each team to establish parameters and purposes and to discuss findings and suggestions. Recommendations from these teams have resulted in changes in financial, programmatic, technological, and hiring policies.

Conclusion

Throughout this volume, we see evidence that changes in the external environment, including economic factors, evolving demographics, and the influence of technology are necessitating a response by community colleges. Some of the changes have taken place too recently to be able to provide a full evaluation of the outcomes. While an analysis of these changes by an outside observer might have yielded different results, it is still important to note the different reactions that internally and externally initiated changes elicit in the higher education community. Because a lack of institutional cooperation has been seen to hinder the implementation of legislatively-mandated changes, state lawmakers should solicit the input and support of the higher education community before passing legislation that dramatically affects these institutions.

This Digest is drawn from *New Directions for Community Colleges*, Number 102, edited by John Stewart Levin, published in Summer 1998: "Organizational Change in the Community College: Ripple or a Sea Change?" The cited articles include: "The Postmodern Challenge: Changing Our Community Colleges" by William Bergquist; "An Organizational Response to Welcoming Students of Color" by Berta Vigil Laden; "Making Sense of Organizational Change" by John Stewart Levin; "The Urban Community College in the Midst of Change" by J. Marie Pepicello and Marsha Hopkins; "Managing Change: A Case Study in Evolving Strategic Management" by Linda Thor, Carol Scarafiotti, & Laura Helminski; "A Feminist Critique of Organizational Change in the Community College" by Barbara K. Townsend & Susan B. Twombly; "In Search of Vision and Values: The Minnesota Higher Education Merger" by Steven Wallace; "Shared Governance in California" by Kenneth B. White.

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